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THE ABSOLUTE
UNLAWFULNESS
OF THE
STAGE-ENTERTAINMENT
FULLY DEMONSTRATED.

By *WILLIAM LAW*, M. A.

THE FIFTH EDITION.

L O N D O N :

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UNITED STATES

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Printed in the Richmond in 1870

MEADOWS

(Price 25 Cts.)



THE
Absolute Unlawfulness
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STAGE ENTERTAINMENT.

I Am sensible that the Title of this little Book will, to the Generality of People, seem too high a Flight; that it will be looked upon as the Effect of a fanatical Spirit, carrying Matters higher than the Sobriety of Religion requires. I have only one Thing to ask of such People, that they will suspend their Judgment for a while, and be content to read so small a Treatise as this is, before they pass any Judgment, either upon the Merits of the Subject, or the Temper of the Writer.

Had a Person some Years ago, in the Time of *Popery*, wrote against the *Worship of Images*, as a *Worship* absolutely unlawful, our Ancestors would have looked upon him as a Man of a very *irregular* Spirit. Now it is possible for the present Age to be as much mistaken in their *Pleasures*, as the former were in their *Devotions*; and that the allowed Diversions of these Times may be as great a Contradiction to the most essential Doctrines of Christianity, as the *Superstitions* and *Corruptions* of the former Ages. All therefore that I desire, is only a little *Free-thinking* upon this Subject; and that People will not as blindly reject all Reason, when it examines their Pleasures, as some blindly reject all Reason, when it examines the Nature of their *Devotions*.

It is possible that *something* that is called a *Diversion*, may be as contrary to the whole Nature of Religion, as any invented Superstition, and perhaps more dangerous

to those that comply with it. As the Worship of *Images* was a great Sin, though under a Pretence of Piety, so the Entertainment of the *Stage* may be very sinful, though it is only intended as a Diversion.

For if the Worship of *Images* did not cease to be sinful, though it was intended for pious Purposes, it must be great Weakness to imagine, that the Entertainment of the *Stage* cannot be any great Sin, because it is only used as a Diversion.

Yet this is a Way of reasoning that a great many People fall into : They say, Diversions are lawful ; that the *Stage* is only a Diversion ; that People go to it without meaning any Harm, and therefore there can be no Sin in it.

But if these People were to hear a Man say, that Religion is lawful ; that the Worship of *Images* was an Act of Religion ; that he used *Images* as a Means of religious Devotion, and therefore there could be no Sin in it ; they would mightily lament the Bigotry and Blindness of his Mind. Yet surely this is as wise and reasonable, as for a Person to say, I go to a Play only as to a Diversion : I mean no Harm, and therefore there can be no Sin in it. For if Practices may be exceeding sinful, though they are intended for pious Ends, certainly Practices may be very abominable, though they are only used as Diversions.

When therefore we condemn the *Blindness* of some Christian Countries, for conforming to such gross Corruptions of Religion, we should do well to remember, that they have thus much to be pleaded in their Excuse, that what they do is under a Notion of Piety ; that it is in Obedience to the Authority both of Church and State, and that they are at the same time kept entire Strangers to the Scriptures. But how justly may the same Blindness be charged upon us, if it should appear, that without having any of their Excuses, our Public Stated Diversions are as contrary to Scripture, and the fundamental Doctrines of Religion, as any of the grossest Instances of Superstition ? If we hold it lawful to go to wicked sinful Diversions, we are as great Strangers to True Religion, as they who are pleased with buying *Indulges*, and worshipping Pieces of holy Wood. For

For a *Sinful Diversion* is the same Absurdity in Religion, as a *Corrupt Worship*, and it shews the same Blindness of Mind, and Corruption of Heart, whether we sin against God in the *Church*, or in our *Closets*, or in the *Play-House*. If there is any thing contrary to Religion in any of these Places, it brings us under the same Guilt. There may perhaps be this difference, that God may be less displeased with such Corruptions as we comply with through a blind Devotion, than with such as we indulge ourselves in through a Wantonness of Mind, and a Fondness for Diversions.

The Matter therefore stands thus: If it should appear that the Stage-Entertainment is entirely sinful; that it is contrary to more Doctrines of Scripture than the Worship of *Images*; then it follows, that all who defend it, and take their Share of it, are in the same State as they who worship *Images*, and defend Drunkenness and Intemperance. For to defend or support any sinful Diversion, is the same Thing as supporting or defending any other sinful Practice. It therefore as much concerns us to know whether our Diversions are reasonable, and conformable to Religion, as to know whether our Religion be reasonable and conformable to Truth. For if we allow ourselves in Diversions that are contrary to Religion, we are in no better a State than those whose Religion is contrary to Truth.

I have mentioned the Worship of *Images*, because it is so great a Corruption in Religion, so contrary to Scripture, and so justly abhorred by all the Reformed Churches; that the Reader may hence learn what he is to think of himself, if the Stage is ever his Diversion: For I am fully persuaded, that he will here find Arguments against the *Stage*, as strong and plain as any that can be urged against the Worship of *Images*, or any other Corruption of the most corrupt Religion.

Let it therefore be observed, that the Stage is not here condemned, as some other Diversions, because they are dangerous, and likely to be Occasions of Sin; but that it is condemned, as Drunkenness and Lewdness, as Lying and Profaneness are to be condemned, not as Things

that may only be the Occasion of Sin, but such as are in their own Nature grossly sinful.

You go to hear a *Play*: I tell you, that you go to hear *Ribaldry* and *Profaneness*; that you entertain your Mind with extravagant *Thoughts*, wild *Rants*, *blasphemous Speeches*, wanton *Amours*, profane *Jests*, and impure *Passions*. If you ask me, Where is the Sin of all this? You may as well ask me, Where is the Sin of *Swearing* and *Lying*? For it is not only a Sin against this or that particular Text of Scripture, but it is a Sin against the *whole Nature* and Spirit of our Religion.

It is a Contradiction to all Christian Holiness, and to all the Methods of arriving at it. For can any one think that he has a true Christian Spirit, that his Heart is changed as it ought to be, that he is born again of God, whilst he is diverting himself with the Lewdness, Impudence, Profaneness, and impure Discourses of the Stage? Can he think that he is endeavouring to be holy as Christ is holy, to live by his Wisdom, and be full of his Spirit, so long as he allows himself in such an Entertainment? For there is nothing in the Nature of Christian Holiness, but what is all contrary to the whole Spirit and Temper of this Entertainment. That Disposition of Heart which is to take Pleasure in the various Representations of the *Stage*, is as directly contrary to that Disposition of Heart which Christianity requires, as Revenge is contrary to Meekness, or Malice to Good-will. Now that which is thus contrary to the whole Nature and Spirit of Religion, is certainly much more condemned, than that which is only contrary to some particular Part of it.

But this is plainly the Case of the *Stage*: It is an Entertainment that consists of lewd, impudent, profane Discourses, and as such is contrary to the *whole Nature* of our Religion. For all the Parts of Religion, or its whole Nature has only this one Design, to give us Purity of Heart, to change the Temper and Taste of our Souls, and fill us with such holy Tempers, as may make us fit to live with God in the Society of pure and glorious Spirits.

An Entertainment therefore which applies to the Corruption of our Nature, which awakens our disordered Passions, and teaches to relish Lewdness, immoral Rant, and

and Profaneness, is exceeding sinful, not only as it is a Breach of some particular Duty, but as it contradicts the *whole Nature*, and opposes *every Part* of our Religion.

For this Diversion, which consists of such Discourses as these, injures us in a very different manner from other Sins. For as Discourses are an Application to our whole Soul, as they entertain the Heart, and awaken and employ all our Passions, so they more fatally undo all that Religion has done, than several other Sins. For as Religion consists in a right Turn of Mind; as it is a State of the Heart; so whatever supports a quite contrary Turn of Mind and State of the Heart, has all the Contrariety to Religion that it can possibly have.

St. John says, *Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.* There is no other certain Sign of our belonging to Christ; every other Sign may deceive us: All the external Parts of Religion may be in vain; it is only the State of our Mind and Spirit, that is a certain Proof that we are in a true State of Christianity. And the Reason is plain, because Religion has no other End, than to alter our Spirit, and give us new Dispositions of Heart, suitable to its Purity and Holiness. That therefore which immediately applies to our Spirit, which supports a wrong Turn of Mind, which betrays our Hearts into impure Delights, destroys all our Religion, because it destroys that turn of Mind and Spirit, which is the sole End and Design of all our Religion.

When therefore you are asked, Why is it unlawful to swear? You can answer, Because it is contrary to the Third Commandment. But if you are asked, Why is it unlawful to use the Entertainment of the Stage? You can carry your answer farther, Because it is an Entertainment that is contrary to all the Parts, the whole Nature of Religion, and contradicts every holy Temper which the Spirit of Christianity requires. So that if you live in the use of this Diversion, you have no Grounds to hope that you have the Spirit and Heart of a Christian.

Thus stands the first Argument against the *Stage*: It has all the Weight in it, that the whole Weight of Religion can give to any Argument.

If you are only for the *Form* of Religion, you may
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take the Diversion of the Stage along with it. But if you desire the *Spirit* of Religion, if you desire to be truly religious in Heart and Mind, it is as necessary to renounce and abhor the Stage, as to seek to God, and pray for the Guidance of his holy Spirit.

Secondly. Let the next Argument against the Stage be taken from its manifest Contrariety to this important Passage of Scripture : *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption.*

Here we see, that all corrupt and unedifying Communication is absolutely sinful, and forbidden in Scripture, for this Reason, because it *grieves the Holy Spirit*, and separates *Him* from us. But if it be thus unlawful to have any corrupt Communication of our own, can we think it lawful to go to Places set apart for that Purpose ; to give our Money, and hire Persons to corrupt our Hearts with ill Discourses, and inflame all the disorderly Passions of our Nature ? We have the Authority of Scripture to affirm, that *evil Communication corrupts good Manners*, and that *unedifying Discourses grieve the Holy Spirit*.

Now the *Third* Commandment is not more plain and express against *Swearing*, than this Doctrine is plain and positive against going to the *Play-House*. If you should see a Person that acknowledges the *Third* Commandment to be a divine Prohibition against *Swearing*, yet going to a *House*, and giving his *Money* to Persons who were there met to *Curse* and *Swear* in fine Language, and invent *Musical Oaths* and *Imprecations*, would you not think him mad in the highest Degree ? Now consider whether there be a less Degree of Madness in going to the *Play-House*. You own that God has called you to great Purity of Conversation ; that you are forbid all *foolish Discourse*, and *filthy Jestings*, as expressly as you are forbid *Swearing* ; and that you are told to *let no corrupt Communication proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good, for the use of edifying* : And yet you go to a *House* set apart for corrupt Communication ; You hire Persons

to entertain you with all manner of *Ribaldry*, *Profaneness*, *Rant*, and *Impurity* of Discourse, who are to present you with *vile* Thoughts, lewd Imaginations, in *fine Language*, and to make *wicked*, *vain*, and *impure Discourse* more lively and affecting, than you could possibly have it in any ill Company. Now is not this Sinning with as high a Hand, and as grossly offending against plain Doctrines of Scripture, as if you were to give your Money to be entertained with *Musical Oaths* and *Curses*?

You might reasonably think that *Woman* very ridiculous in her *Piety*, that durst not swear herself, but should nevertheless frequent *Places* to hear *Oaths*. But you may as justly think her very ridiculous in her *Modesty*, who though she dares not to say, or look, or do an immodest Thing herself, should yet give her Money to see *Women* forget the *Modesty* of their Sex, and talk *impudently* in a Public *Play-House*. If the *Play-House* was filled with *Rakes* and *ill Women*, there would be nothing to be wondered at in such an Assembly: For *such Persons* to be delighted with such Entertainments, is as natural, as for any *Animal* to delight in its proper *Element*. But for Persons who profess Purity and Holiness, who would not be suspected of *immodest* or *corrupt Communications*, for them to come under the Roof of a *House* devoted to such ill Purposes, and to be pleased Spectators of such Actions and Discourses, as are the Pleasures of the most abandoned Persons; for them to give their Money to be thus entertained, is such a Contradiction to all Piety and common Sense, as cannot be sufficiently exposed.

Consider now, if you please, the Worship of *Images*. You wonder that any People can be so blind, so regardless of Scripture, as to comply with such a Devotion. It is indeed wonderful. But is it not as wonderful, that you should seek and delight in an Entertainment made up of Lewdness, Profaneness, and all the extravagant Rant of disordered Passions, when the Scripture positively charges you to forbear all *corrupt Communication*, as that which grieves the *Holy Spirit*, and separates him from us? Is not this being *blind* and *regardless* of Scripture in as high a degree? For how can the Scripture speak higher, or plainer, or enforce its Doctrines with a more dreadful
Penalty,

Penalty, than that which is here declared ? For without the Holy Spirit of God, we are but Figures of Christians, and must die in our Sins.

If it was said in Scripture, Forbear from all Image-Worship, because it *grieves and removes the Holy Spirit* from you, perhaps you would think the Worshippers of *Images* under greater Blindness, and Corruption of Heart, than they now are. But observe, that if you go to the *Stage*, you offend against Scripture in as high a degree as they, who should worship *Images*, though the Scriptures forbid it as *grievous to the Holy Spirit*.

If therefore I was to rest here, I might fairly say, that I had proved the *Stage* to be as contrary to Scripture, as the Worship of *Images* is contrary to the Second Commandment. You think it a strange Contrariety, to see People on their Knees before an *Image* at a Time that the Heart and Mind should raise itself to God. But then, is it not as strange a Contrariety, that a Person should indulge himself in the lewd profane Discourses of the *Stage*, who should have his Heart and Mind preserved in the Wisdom, the Purity, and Spirit of Religion ? For an *Image* is not so contrary to God, as *Plays* are contrary to the Wisdom, the Purity, and the Spirit of Scripture. An *Image* is only contrary to God, as it has no Power or Perfection : But *Plays* are contrary to Scripture, as the Devil is contrary to God, as they are full of another Spirit and Temper. He therefore that indulges himself in the wicked Temper of the *Stage*, sins against as plain Scripture, and offends against more Doctrines of it, than he that uses *Images* in his Devotions.

I proceed now to a Third Argument against the *Stage*.

When you see the *Players* acting with Life and Spirit, Men and Women *equally bold* in all Instances of *Profaneness*, *Passion*, and *Immodesty*, I dare say you never suspect any of them to be Persons of *Christian Piety*. You cannot, even in your Imagination, join Piety to such Manners, and such a Way of Life. Your Mind will no more allow you to join Piety with the Behaviour of the *Stage*, than it will allow you to think *two* and *two* to be *ten*. And perhaps you had rather see your Son chained to a *Galley*, or your Daughter driving *Plow*, than getting their

their Bread on the Stage, by administering in so scandalous a manner to the Vices and corrupt Pleasures of the World. Let this therefore be another Argument, to prove the *Absolute Unlawfulness* of going to a *Play*. For consider with yourself, Is the Business of *Players* so contrary to Piety, so inconsistent with the Spirit and Temper of a true Christian, that it is next to a Contradiction to suppose them united, how then can you take yourself to be *innocent*, who *delight* in their Sins, and *hire* them to commit them?

You may make yourself a Partaker of other Men's Sins, by Negligence, and for want of reproofing them: But certainly, if you stand by, and assist Men in their evil Actions, if you make their Vices your Pleasures and Entertainment, and pay your Money to be so entertained, you make yourself a Partaker of their Sins in a very high degree; and consequently, it must be as unlawful to go to a *Play*, as it is unlawful to approve, encourage, assist, and reward a Man for *Renouncing* a Christian Life.

Let therefore all *Men* and *Women* that go to a *Play*, ask themselves this Question; Whether it suits with their Religion, to act the *Parts* that are there acted? Perhaps they would think this as inconsistent with that degree of Piety that they profess, as to do the vilest Things. But let them consider, that it must be a wicked and unlawful Pleasure to delight in any thing, that they dare not to do themselves. Let them also consider, that they are really *acting* those *Indecencies* and *Impieties* themselves, which they think is the particular Guilt of the *Players*. For a Person may very justly be said to do that *himself*, which he *pays* for the doing, and which is done for his Pleasure.

You must therefore, if you would be consistent with yourself, as much abhor the Thoughts of being at a *Play*, as of being a *Player* yourself. For to think that you must abhor the one, and not the other, is as absurd as to suppose, that you must be temperate yourself, but may assist, encourage, and reward other People for their Intemperance. The Business of a *Player* is profane, wicked, lewd, and immodest: To be any way therefore approving, assisting, or encouraging him in such a Way of Life, is as evidently

evidently sinful, as it is sinful to assist and encourage a Man in *Stealing*, or any other Wickedness.

This Argument is not far-fetched, or founded in any Subtilties of Reasoning, but is so plain and obvious, that the meanest capacity must needs understand it. I may venture to challenge any one to shew me, that the Business of the *Player* is a more Christian Employment than that of *Robbers*. For he must know very little of the Nature of Religion, that can look upon Lust, Profaneness, and disorderly Passions, to be less contrary to Religion, than the taking Money from the right Owner. And a Person who devotes himself to this Employment, to get his Bread by gratifying the corrupt Taste of the World with wanton, wild, profane Discourses, may be justly supposed to have a more corrupt Heart himself, than many a Man who has taken unlawful Ways of relieving his Wants.

I speak to this Matter with thus much Plainness, because there is so plain Reason for it; and because I think, there is as much Justice and Tenderneſs in telling every Player that his Employment is abominably sinful, and inconsistent with the Christian, as in telling the same Thing to a *Thief*. As it ought to be reckoned no Sign of Enmity or Ill-will, if I should attempt to prove to *Malefactors* the horrid Nature of their Sins, and the Necessity of a sincere Repentance, so I hope it will not be looked upon as a Sign of ill Temper, or Anger at any particular Persons, that I set the Business of Players among the most abominable Crimes. For it is with no other Intent, but that they themselves may avoid the dreadful Guilt of so wicked a Profession, and that other People may not dare any longer to support them in it. For it certainly concerns all People, who are not so void of Religion as to be Players themselves, to be strictly careful that they have no Share in the Guilt of so unchristian a Profession.

This we reckon very good Reasoning in all other Cases. A Person that dares not *steal*, thinks it equally sinful to encourage Theft. Any one that abhors *Perjury*, or *Murder*, knows that he commits those Sins, if he encourages other People in them. What therefore must we think

think of ourselves, if the Blasphemy, Profaneness, Lewdness, Immodesty, and wicked Rant of Plays, are Parts that we dare not act ourselves, yet make it our Diversion to be delighted with those that do? Shall we think ourselves more enlightened, or more reasonable, than those that worship *Images*? The Second Commandment cannot fright them from the use of Images, but it is because they have had a superstitious Education, are taught to be blindly obedient, and have the Pretence of Piety for what they do. But all the grossest Sins of the *Stage* cannot fright us from it, though we see the Sins, and have nothing to pretend for Compliance, but mere Idleness and Diversion.

If any one was to collect all the foolish vain *Devotions*, which poor mistaken Creatures have paid to *Images*, it would sufficiently justify our Abhorrence of them, and shew the Wisdom of the *Reformation* in abolishing the Use of them. But if a Person was to make a Collection of all the wicked, profane, blasphemous, lewd, impudent, detestable Things, that are said in the Play-House only in *one Season*, it would appear to be such a Mass of Sin, as would sufficiently justify any one in saying, that the Business of Players is the most wicked and detestable Profession in the World.

All People therefore who ever enter into their House, or contribute the smallest Mite towards it, must look upon themselves, as having been so far Friends to the most powerful Instruments of Debauchery, and to be guilty of contributing to a bold, open, and publick Exercise of Impudence, Impurity, and Profaneness. When we encourage any good Design, either with our Consent, our Money, or Presence, we are apt to take a great deal of Merit to ourselves; we presently conclude that we are Partakers of all that is *good and praise-worthy in it*, of all the Benefit that arises from it, because we are Contributors towards it. A Man does not think that he has no Share in some publick Charity, because he is but one in ten thousand that contributes towards it; but if it be a religious Charity, and attended with great and happy Effects, his Conscience tells him that he is a Sharer of *all* that great Good to which he contributes. Now let this teach us,
how

how we ought to judge of the Guilt of encouraging any thing that is bad, either with our *Consent*, our *Money*, or our *Presence*. We must not consider how much our single Part contributes towards it, nor how much less we contribute than several thousands of other People, but we must look at the *whole thing* in itself, and whatever there is of Evil in it, or whatever Evil arises from it, we must charge ourselves with a Share of the whole Guilt of so great an Evil. Thus it is that we hope and desire to partake of the Merit of all good Designs, which we any way countenance and encourage; and thus it is that the Guilt of all wicked things, which we countenance and assist, will certainly be laid to our Charge.

To proceed now to a fourth Argument. When I consider *Churches*, and the Matter of *Divine Service*, that it consists of holy Readings, Prayers, and Exhortations to Piety, there is Reason to think that the House of God is a natural Means of promoting Piety and Religion, and rendering Men devout, and sensible of their Duty to God. The very Nature of Divine Assemblies, thus carried on, has this direct Tendency: I ask you whether this is not very plain, that *Churches* thus employed should have this Effect? Consider therefore the *Play-House*, and the Matter of the Entertainment there, as it consists of *Love-Intrigues*, *blasphemous Passions*, *profane Discourses*, *lewd Descriptions*, *filthy Jest*s, and all the most extravagant Rant of wanton profligate Persons of both Sexes, heating and inflaming one another with all the *Wantonness* of Address, the *Immodesty* of Motion, and *Lewdness* of Thought, that Wit can invent; consider, I say, whether it be not plain, that a House so employed is as certainly serving the Cause of *Immorality* and *Vice*, as the House of God is serving the Cause of *Piety*? For what is there in our *Church Service* that shews it to be *useful* to Piety and Holiness, what is there in Divine Worship to correct and amend the Heart, but what is directly contrary to all that is doing in the *Play-House*? So that one may with the same Assurance affirm, that the *Play-House*, not only when some very profane Play is on the *Stage*, but in its *daily common* Entertainments, is as certainly the *House of the Devil*, as the Church is the *House of God*.
For

For though the Devil be not professedly worshipped by Hymns directed to him, yet most that is there sung is to his Service; he is there *obeyed* and *pleased* in as certain a manner, as God is worshipped and honoured in the Church.

You must easily see, that the Charge against the *Play-House* is not the Effect of any *particular Temper*, or Weakness of Mind; that it is not an *uncertain Conjecture*, or *religious Whimsy*; but it is a Judgment founded as plainly in the *Nature* and *Reason* of Things, as when it is affirmed, that the House of God is of Service to Religion: And he that absolutely condemns the *Play-House*, as wicked and of a corrupting Nature, proceeds upon as much Truth and Certainty, as he that absolutely commends the *House of God*, as holy and tending to promote Piety.

When therefore any one pretends to vindicate the *Stage* to you, as a proper Entertainment for holy and religious Persons, you ought to reject the Attempt with as much Abhorrence, as if he should offer to shew you, that our *Church Service* was rightly formed for those Persons to join in, who are *devoted to the Devil*. For to talk of the *Lawfulness* and *Usefulness* of the *Stage* is full as absurd, and contrary to the plain Nature of Things, as to talk of the *Unlawfulness* and *Mischief* of the Service of the Church. He therefore that tells you, that you may safely go to the *Play-House*, as an innocent useful Entertainment of your Mind, commits the same Offence against common Sense, as if he should tell you, that it was dangerous to attend at Divine Service, and that its Prayers and Hymns were great *Pollutions* of the Mind.

For the Matter and Manner of *Stage-Entertainments* are as undeniable Proofs, and as obvious to common Sense, that the House belongs to the Devil, and is the Place of his Honour, as the Matter and Manner of *Church Service* prove that the Place is appropriated to God.

Observe therefore, that as you do not want the Assistance of any one to shew you the *Usefulness* and *Advantage* of Divine Service, because the thing is plain, and speaks for itself, so neither, on the other hand, need you any one to shew the *Unlawfulness* and *Mischief* of the Stage, because there the thing is equally plain, and
speaks

speaks for itself. So that you are to consider yourself as having the same Assurance, that the *Stage* is wicked, and to be abhorred and avoided by all Christians, as you have, that the Service of the Church is holy, and to be sought after by all Lovers of Holiness. Consider therefore, that your Conduct, with relation to the *Stage*, is not a Matter of *Nicety*, or *scrupulous Exactness*, but that you are as certain that you do wrong in as notorious a manner, when you go to the *Play-House*, as you are certain that you do right, when you go to *Church*.

Now it is of mighty Use to conceive Things in a right manner, and to see them as they are in their own Nature. Whilst you consider the *Play-House* only as a *Place of Diversion*, it may perhaps give no Offence to your Mind, there is nothing *shocking* in the Thought of it; but if you would lay aside this Name of it for a while, and consider it in its *own Nature*, as it really is, you would find that you are as much deceived, if you consider the *Play-House* as only a *Place of Diversion*, as you would be, if you considered the House of God only as a *Place of Labour*.

When therefore you are tempted to go to a *Play*, either from your own Inclination, or from the Desire of a Friend, fancy that you was asked in plain Terms to go to the Place of the *Devil's Abode*, where he holds his *filthy Court* of evil Spirits; that you was asked to join in an Entertainment, where he was at the Head of it; where the whole of it was in order to his Glory, that Mens Hearts and Minds might be separated from God, and plunged into all the Pollutions of Sin and Brutality. Fancy that you are going to a Place that as certainly belongs to the Devil, as the *heathen Temples* of old, where *Brutes* were worshipped, where *wanton Hymns* were sung to *Venus*, and drunken Songs to the God of Wine. Fancy that you are as certainly going to the Devil's *Triumph*, as if you was going to those *old Sports*, where People committed Murder, and offered Christians to be devoured by wild Beasts, for the Diversion of the Spectators. Now whilst you consider the *Play-House* in this View, I suppose you can no more go to a *Play*, than you can renounce your Christianity.

Consider

Consider now therefore, that you have not been frightening yourself with *groundless Imaginations*, but that which you have here fancied of the *Play-House* is as strictly true, as if you had been fancying, that when you go to Church you go to the House of God, where the heavenly Hosts attend upon his Service; and that when you read the Scriptures, and sing holy Hymns, you join with the Choirs above, and do God's Will on Earth as it is done in Heaven. For observe, I pray you, how justly that Opinion of the *Play-House* is founded. For was it a Joy to God to see *Idols* worshipped, to see Hymns and Adorations offered up to impure and filthy Deities? Were Places and Festivals appointed for such Ends justly esteemed Places and Festivals devoted to the Devil? Now give the Reason why all this was justly reckoned a Service to the Devil, and you will give as good a Reason why the *Play-House* is to be esteemed his *Temple*.

For what though Hymns and Adorations are not offered to impure and filthy Deities, yet if *Impurity* and *Filthiness* is the *Entertainment*, if immodest Songs, profane Rant, if Lust and Passion entertain the Audience, the Business is the same, and the Assembly does the *same Honour* to the Devil, though they be not gathered together in the Name of some *Heathen God*.

For Impurity and Profaneness in the Worshippers of the True God is as acceptable a Service to the Devil, as Impurity and Profaneness in Idolaters; and perhaps a *lewd Song*, in an Assembly of Christians, gives him a greater Delight than in a Congregation of *Heathens*.

If therefore we may say, that a *House* or *Festival* was the Devil's, because he was *delighted* with it, because what was there done, was an *acceptable Service* to him, we may be assured that the *Play-House* is as really the House of the Devil, as any other House ever was. Nay, it is reasonable to think, that the *Play-Houses* in this Kingdom are a greater Pleasure to him, than any *Temple* he ever had in the Heathen World. For as it is a greater Conquest to make the Disciples of Christ delight in *Lewdness* and *Profaneness*, than ignorant Heathens, so a *House* that, in the Midst of *Christian Churches*, trains up Christians to *Lewdness* and *Profaneness*, that makes the

Worshippers of Christ flock together in Crowds, to rejoice in an Entertainment that is as contrary to the Spirit of Christ, as *Hell* is contrary to *Heaven*; a House so employed may justly be reckoned a more delightful Habitation of the Devil, than any Temple in the Heathen World.

When therefore you go to the *Play-House*, you have as much Assurance that you go to the Devil's peculiar Habitation, that you submit to his Designs, and rejoice in his Diversions, which are his best Devices against Christianity, you have as much Assurance of this, as that they who worshipped filthy Deities were in reality Worshippers of the Devil.

Hence it appears, that if instead of considering the *Play-House*, as only a Place of Diversion, you will but examine what Materials it is made of; if you will but consider the Nature of the Entertainment, and what is there doing; you will find it as wicked a Place, as sinful a Diversion, and as truly the peculiar Pleasure of the Devil, as any wicked Place, or sinful Diversion in the Heathen World. When therefore you are asked to go to a Play, do not think that you are only asked to go to a Diversion, but be assured that you are asked to *yield* to the Devil, to go over to his Party, and to make one of his Congregation. That if you do go, you have not only the Guilt of *buying* so much vain Communication, and paying People for being wicked, but are also as certainly guilty of going to the Devil's House, and doing him the same Honour, as if you was to partake of some *Heathen Festival*. You must consider, that all the Laughter there is not only vain and foolish, but that it is a Laughter among Devils, that you are upon profane Ground, and hearing Musick in the very Porch of Hell.

Thus it is in the Reason of the thing. And if we should now consider the State of our *Play-House*, as it is in Fact, we should find it answering all these Characters, and producing Effects suitable to its Nature. But I shall forbear this Consideration, it being as unnecessary to tell the Reader, that our *Play-House* is in Fact the *Sink of Corruption and Debauchery*; that it is the general Rendezvous of the most profligate Persons of both Sexes; that it corrupts the Air, and turns the adjacent Places into public

lic Nufances; this is as unnecessary, as to tell him that the *Exchange* is a Place of *Merchandize*.

Now it is to be observed, that this is not the State of the *Play-House* through any accidental Abuse, as any innocent or good thing may be abused; but that Corruption and Debauchery are the truly natural and genuine Effects of the *Stage-Entertainment*. Let not therefore any one say, that he is not answerable for those Vices and Debaucheries which are occasioned by the *Play-House*, for so far as he partakes of the Pleasure of the *Stage*, and is an Encourager of it, so far he is chargeable with those Disorders which necessarily are occasioned by it. If Evil arises from our doing our Duty, or our Attendance at any good *Design*, we are not to be frighted at it; but if Evil arises from any thing as its *natural* and *genuine* Effect, in all such Cases, so far as we contribute to the Cause, so far we make ourselves guilty of the Effects. So that all who any way assist the *Play-House*, or ever encourage it by their Presence, make themselves chargeable, in some degree, with all the Evils and Vices which follow from it. Since therefore it cannot be doubted by any one, whether the *Play-House* be a Nursery of Vice and Debauchery, since the evil Effects it has upon Peoples Manners is as visible as the Sun at Noon, one would imagine, that all People of *Virtue* and *Modesty* should not only avoid it, but avoid it with the utmost Abhorrence; that they should be so far from entring into it, that they should detest the very Sight of it. For what a Contradiction is it to common Sense, to hear a Woman lamenting the miserable Lewdness and Debauchery of the Age, the vicious Taste and irregular Pleasures of the World, and at the same time dressing herself to meet the lewdest Part of the World at the Fountain-head of all Lewdness, and making herself one of that Croud, where every abandoned Wretch is glad to be present? She may fancy that she hates and abominates their Vices, but she may depend upon it, that till she hates and abominates the Place of vicious Pleasures; till she dares not come near an Entertainment, which is the Cause of so great Debauchery, and the Pleasure of the most debauched People; till she is thus disposed, she wants the truest Sign of a real and religious Abhorrence of the Vices of the Age.

For to wave all other Considerations, I would only ask her a Question or two on the single Article of *Modesty*. What is *Modesty*? Is it a little *mechanical outside* Behaviour, that goes no farther than a few *Forms and Modes* at particular Times and Places? Or is it a *real Temper*, a natural Disposition of the Heart, that is founded in *Religion*? Now if *Modesty* is only a mechanical Observance of a little outside Behaviour, then I can easily perceive how a modest Woman may frequent *Plays*; there is no Inconsistency for such a one to be one thing in one Place, and another in another Place; to disdain an immodest Conversation, and yet at the same Time relish and delight in immodest and impudent Speeches in a publick *Play-House*. But if *Modesty* is a *real Temper* and Disposition of the Heart, that is founded on the Principles of Religion, then I confess I cannot comprehend, how a Person of such *Modesty* should ever come twice into the *Play-House*. For if it is Reason and Religion that have inspired her with a modest Heart, that make her careful of her Behaviour, that make her hate and abhor every Word, or Look, or Hint in Conversation that has the Appearance of Lewdness, that make her shun the Company of such as talk with too much Freedom; if she is thus modest in *common Life*, from a Principle of Religion, a Temper of Heart, is it possible for such a one (I do not say to seek) but to bear with the Immodesty and Impudence of the *Stage*? For must not Immodesty and Impudence, must not loose and wanton Discourse be the same *hateful things*, and give the same Offence to the modest Mind, in one Place as in another? And must not that Place, which is the Seat of Immodesty, where Men and Women are trained up in Lewdness, where almost every Day in the Year is a Day devoted to the foolish Representations of *Rant, Lust, and Passion*; must not such a Place of all others be the most odious to the Mind, that is *truly modest* upon Principles of *Reason and Religion*? One would suppose, that such a Person should as much abominate the Place, as any other filthy Sight, and be as much offended with an Invitation to it, as if she was invited to see an immodest Picture. For the Representations of the *Stage*, the inflamed Passions of Lovers there described, are as gross
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an Offence to the Ear, as any Representation that can offend the Eye.

It ought not to be concluded, that because I affirm the *Play-House* to be an Entertainment *contrary* to Modesty, that therefore I accuse all People as void of Modesty whoever go to it. I might affirm, that *Transubstantiation* is contrary to all *Sense* and *Reason*; but then it would be a wrong Conclusion, to say that I affirmed that all who believe it are void of all *Sense* and *Reason*.

Now as *Prejudices*, the Force of *Education*, the Authority of *Numbers*, the Way of the World, the Example of *great Names*, may make People *believe*, so the same Causes may make People act against all *Sense* and *Reason*, and be guilty of Practices which no more suit with the *Purity* of their Religion, than *Transubstantiation* agrees with *common Sense*.

To proceed. *Trebonia* thus excuses herself for going to the *Play-House*. I go but seldom; and then either with my *Mother* or my *Aunt*: We always know the Play beforehand, and never go on the *Sacrament-Week*: And what harm pray, says she, can there be in this? It breaks in upon no Rules of my Life. I neglect no Part of my Duty: I go to *Church*, and perform the same Devotions at home, as on other Days.

It ought to be observed, that this Excuse can only be allowed, where the Diversion itself is innocent: It must therefore first be considered, what the Entertainment is in itself; whether it be suitable to the Spirit and Temper of Religion: For if it is right and proper in itself, it needs no Excuse; but if it be *wrong* and *contrary* to Religion, we are not to use it *cautiously*, but to avoid it *constantly*.

Trebonia must be told, that it is no Proof of the Innocence of a Thing, that it does not interfere with her *Hours of Duty*, nor break the Regularity of her Life; for very wicked Ways of spending Time may yet be consistent with a regular Distribution of our Hours. She must therefore consider, not only whether such a Diversion hinders the Regularity of her Life, or breaks in upon her Hours of Devotion, publick or private, but whether it hinders, or any way affects the *Spirit* and

Temper which all her Devotions aspire after. Is it conformable to that heavenly Affection, that Love of God, that Purity of Heart, that Wisdom of Mind, that Perfection of Holiness, that Contempt of the World, that Watchfulness and Self-denial, that Humility and Fear of Sin, which Religion requires? Is it conformable to those Graces, which are to be the *daily Subject* of all her Prayers? This is the only way for her to know the *Innocence* of going to a Play. If what she there hears and sees, has no *Contrariety* to any *Grace* or *Virtue* that she prays for; if all that there passes, be fit for the *Purity* and *Piety* of one that is led by the Spirit of Christ, and is *working out* her *Salvation with fear and trembling*; if the Stage be an Entertainment that may be thought to be according to the Will of God; then she disposes of an Hour very innocently, though her *Mother* or her *Aunt* were not with her.

But if the *contrary* to all this be true; if most of what she there *bears* and *sees* be as contrary to the *Piety* and *Purity* of Christianity, as *Feasting* is contrary to *Fasting*; if the *House* which she supports with her *Money*, and encourages with her *Presence*, be a notorious Means of Corruption, visibly carrying on the Cause of *Vice* and *Debauchery*; she must not think herself excused for being with her *Mother*.

Trebonia would perhaps think it strange, to hear one of her virtuous Acquaintance giving the like Reason for going now and then to a *Masquerade*.

Now this Diversion is new in our Country; and therefore most People yet judge of it in the manner that they ought, because they are not blinded by *Use* and *Custom*. But let any one give but the true Reasons, why a Person of *Virtue* and *Piety* should not go to *Masquerades*, and the same Reasons will as plainly shew, that Persons of *Virtue* and *Piety* should keep at as great a distance from the *Play House*. For the Entertainment of the *Stage* is more directly opposite to the *Purity* of Religion, than *Masquerades*, and is besides as certain a Means of Corruption, and serves all bad Ends in as great a degree as they do. They only differ, as bad Things of the same Kind may differ from one another. So that if the evil Use, and ill Consequences of *Masquerades*, be a sufficient

ficient Reason to deter People of Piety from partaking of them, the same evil Use, and ill Consequences of the *Stage*, ought to keep all People of Virtue from it. If People will consult their *Temper*s only, they may take the Entertainment of one, and condemn the other; as following the same Guide, they may abhor *Intemperance*, and indulge *Malice*: But if they will consult Religion, and make that the Ground of their Opinions, they will find more and stronger Reasons for a constant Abhorrence of the *Stage*, than of *Masquerades*.

Again: If *Trebonia* should hear a Person excusing her Use of *Paint* in this manner; That truly she painted but very seldom; that she always said her Prayers first; that she never used it on *Sundays*, or the Week before the *Communion*: *Trebonia*, would pity such a Mixture of Religion and Weakness. She would desire her to use her Reason, and either to allow *Painting* to be innocent, suitable to the *Sobriety* and *Humility* of a Christian, or else to think it as unlawful at one Time, as at another. But, *Trebonia*, would you not think it still stranger, that she should condemn *Painting* as odious and sinful, and yet think that the *Regularity* of her Life, and the *Exactness* of her Devotions, might make it lawful for her to paint now and then?

I doubt not but you plainly see the Weakness and Folly of such a Pretence for *Painting*, under such Rules, at certain Times. And if you would but as impartially consider your Pretences for going sometimes to the Play-House, under the same Rules, you would certainly find them more weak and unreasonable. For *Painting* may with more Reason be reckoned an innocent Ornament, than the Play-House an innocent Diversion. And it supposes a greater *Vanity* of Mind, a more perverted Judgment, and a deeper Corruption of Heart, to seek the Diversion of the *Stage*, than to take the Pleasure of a borrowed Colour. *Painting*, when considered in itself, is undoubtedly a great Sin; but when it is compared to the Use of the *Stage*, it is but as the Mote compared to the Beam.

I know you are offended at this Comparison, because you judge by your *Temper*, and *Prejudices*, and do not

consider the things as they are in themselves, by the pure Light of *Reason* and *Religion*. *Painting* has not been the way of your Family; it is supposed to be the Practice but of *very few*; and those who use it endeavour to *conceal* it: This makes you readily condemn it. On the contrary, your *Mother* and your *Aunt* carry you to the *Play*; you see *virtuous* People there, and the same Persons that fill our *Churches*; so that your *Temper* is as much engaged to think it lawful to go sometimes to a *Play*, as it is engaged to think the Use of *Paint* always odious and sinful.

Lay aside therefore these Prejudices for a while, and fancy that you had been trained up in some Corner of the World in the Principles of Christianity, and had never heard either of the *Play-House* or *Painting*. Imagine now that you was to examine the Lawfulness of them by the Doctrines of Scripture; you would first desire to be told the Nature of these Things, and what they meant. You would be told, that *Painting* was the borrowing of *Colours* from Art, to make the Face look more beautiful. Now though you found no express Text of Scripture against *Painting*, you would find that it was expressly against Tempers required in Scripture; you would therefore condemn it, as proceeding from a Vanity of Mind, and Fondness of Beauty. You would see that the Harm of Painting consisted in this, that it proceeded from a Temper of Mind contrary to the Sobriety and Humility of a Christian, which indeed is harm enough; because this Humility and Sobriety of Mind is as essential to Religion, as Charity and Devotion. So that in judging according to Scripture, you would hold it as unreasonable to *paint sometimes*, as to be sometimes *malicious, indevout, proud, or false*.

You are now to consider the *Stage*; you are to keep close to Scripture, and fancy that you yet know nothing of *Plays*. You ask therefore first, what the *Stage* or *Play-House* is? You are told that it is a *Place* where all sorts of People meet to be entertained with *Discourses, Actions, and Representations*, which are recommended to the Heart by beautiful Scenes, the Splendor or Lights, and the Harmony of Music. You are told that these Discourses
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are the Invention of Men of Wit and Imagination, which describe imaginary *Intrigues* and *Scenes* of *Love*, and introduce *Men* and *Women* discoursing, raving, and acting in all the wild indecent *Transports* of *Lust* and *Passion*. You are told, that the *Diversion* partly consists of *lewd* and *profane* Songs sung to fine Musick, and partly of extravagant Dialogues between *immodest Persons* talking in a *Stile* of *Love* and *Madness*, that is no where else to be found, and entertaining the *Christian Audience* with all the *Violence* of *Passion*, *Corruption* of *Heart*, *Wantonness* of *Mind*, *Immodesty* of *Thought*, and *profane* *Jests*, that the *Wit* of the *Poet* is able to invent. You are told, that the *Players*, *Men* and *Women*, are trained up to act and represent all the *Descriptions* of *Lust* and *Passion* in the *liveliest manner*, to add a *Lewdness* of *Action* to *lewd* *Speeches*; that they get their *Livelihood* by *Cursing*, *Swearing*, and *Ranting* for three *Hours* together to an *Assembly* of *Christians*.

Now though you find no particular *Text* of *Scripture* condemning the *Stage*, or *Tragedy* or *Comedy*, in expresse *Words*; yet what is much more, you find that such *Entertainments* are a gross *Contridiction* to the *whole Nature* of *Religion*; they are not contrary to this or that particular *Temper*, but are contrary to that *whole Turn* of *Heart* and *Mind* which *Religion* requires. *Painting* is contrary to *Humily*, and therefore is to be avoided as *sinful*; but the *Entertainment* of the *Stage*, as it consists of *blasphemous* *Expressions*, *wicked* *Speeches*, *swearing*, *cursing*, and *profaning* the *Name* of *God*, as it abounds with *impious* *Rant*, *silly* *Jests*, *distracted* *Passions*, gross *Descriptions* of *Lust*, and *wanton* *Songs*, is a *Contradiction* to every *Doctrine* that our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* have taught us. So that to abhor *Painting* at all times, because it supposes a *Vanity* of *Mind*, and is contrary to *Humility*, and yet think there is a lawful *Time* to go to the *Play-House*, is as contrary to common *Sense*, as if a *Man* should hold that it was lawful sometimes to offend against all the *Doctrines* of *Religion*, and yet always unlawful to offend against any one *Doctrine* of *Religion*.

If therefore you was to come (as I supposed) from some *Corner* of the *World*, where you had been used to live
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and judge by the Rules of Religion, and upon your Arrival here had been told what Painting and the Stage was; as you would not expect to see Persons of *religious Humility* carrying their Daughters to *Paint-Shops*, or inviting their pious Friends to go along with them, so much less would you expect to hear, that *devout, pious, and modest* Women carried their Daughters, and invited their virtuous Friends to meet them at the Play. Least of all could you imagine, that there were any People too *pious and devout* to indulge the Vanity of *Painting*, and yet not devout and pious enough to abhor the Immorality, Profaneness, Ribaldry, Immorality, and Blasphemy of the *Stage*.

To proceed. A *polite Writer* * of a late Paper thought he had sufficiently ridiculed a certain Lady's Pretensions to *Piety*, when, speaking of her *Closet*, he says,

Together lie her Prayer-Book and Paint,

At once I improve the Sinner and the Saint.

Now, whence comes it that this Writer judges so rightly, and speaks the Truth so plainly, in the Matter of Painting? Whence comes it that the generality of his Readers think his Observation just, and join with him in it? It is because Painting is not yet an *acknowledged Practice*, but is for the most part reckoned a *shameful Instance* of Vanity. Now as we are not prejudiced in favour of this Practice, and have no Excuses to make for our *own Share* in it, so we judge of it impartially, and immediately perceive its Contrariety to a Religious *Temper and State* of Mind. This *Writer* saw this in so strong a Light, that he does not scruple to suppose, that *Paint* is as natural and proper a Means to improve the *Sinner*, as the *Prayer-Book* is to improve the *Saint*.

I should therefore hope, that it need not be imputed to any *Sourness* of Temper, Religious *Weakness*, or *Dulness* of Spirits, if a *Clergyman* should imagine, that the *Profaneness, Debauchery, Lewdness, and Blasphemy* of the *Stage*, is are natural Means to improve the *Sinner*, as the *Bottle of Paint*: Or if he should venture to shew, that the *Church* and the *Play House* are as ridiculous a Contradiction, and do no more suit with the *same Person*, than the *Prayer-Book and Paint*.

I shall

* *Spectator*, No. 79,

I shall now make a Reflection or two upon the present celebrated Entertainment of the *Stage*, which is so much to the Taste of the People, that it has been acted almost every Night one whole Season.

The first Scene is said to be a *magnificent Palace discovered: Venus attended with Graces and Pleasures.*

Now how is it possible, that such a Scene as this should be fit for the Entertainment of Christians? Can *Venus* and her *Graces* and *Pleasures* talk any Language that is like themselves, but what must be *unlike* to the Spirit of Christianity? The very proposing such a Scene as this, supposes the Audience to be fit for the Entertainment of *Lust* and *Wantonness*. For what else can *Venus* and her *Pleasures* offer to them? Had we any Thing of the Spirit of Christianity in us, or were earnestly desirous of those holy Tempers, which are to render us pure in the Eyes of God, we should abominate the very Proposal of such a Scene as this, as knowing that it must be an Entertainment fitter for *public Stews*, than for People who make any Pretences to the Holiness and Purity of the Spirit of Christ. The Scripture says, *Mortify therefore your members which are upon earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence.* This is the Religion by which we are to be saved. But can the Wit of Man invent any thing more contrary to this, that an Entertainment from *Venus* attended with her *Pleasures*? That People should have such a Religion as this, and at the same time such an Entertainment, is an astonishing Instance of the Degeneracy of the present State of Christianity among us. For if the first Scene had been the *Devil attended with Fiends, cursing and blaspheming*, no one could shew that such a Scene was more contrary to the Religion of *Christians*, than a Scene with *Venus* and her *Pleasures*. And if the Devil himself had been consulted by our *Stage Wits*, which of these Scenes he had rather have, he would certainly have chosen *Venus* and her *Pleasures*, as much fitter to debauch and corrupt a Christian Audience, than a Scene of *cursing* and *blaspheming*.

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The Scripture thus describes the Infatuation of the old Idolaters. *And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burnt part of it in the fire; yea, I have also baked bread upon the coals thereof, and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? Shall I fall down to the Stock of a Tree*?* It is here reckoned a strange Instance of their Blindness, that they did not make so easy a Reflection upon the nature of Things. But how near are we to this Blindness, if we do not make as easy a Reflection upon this Entertainment; for the very mentioning of such a Scene as this, is as plain a Demonstration that the Entertainment is contrary to our Religion, as the *burning of Wood*, and its falling into *Asbes*, is a Demonstration that Wood is of a Nature contrary to God. How are we therefore more enlightened, if none of us considers in his Heart, neither is there Knowledge nor Understanding in us to say, *These are the filthy Deities of the Devil's Invention, with which he polluted and defiled the Heathen World. And shall we still preserve their Power among us? Shall we make such Abominations our Diversion?*

For if we worship the God of Purity, if we cannot worship him but with hearts devoted to Purity, what have we to do with these Images of Lewdness? If we dress a *Venus*, and celebrate her Power, and make her *Graces and Pleasures* meet us in wanton *Forms*, and wanton *Language*, is it not as absurd, as contrary to our Religion, as to set up a *Baal* in the Temple of God? What greater Contradiction is there, either to Reason or Religion, in one Case than in the other? *Baal* is as fit for our Devotions, as *Venus* is for our Rejoicings and Praises.

So that the very naming of such a Scene as this is *unlawful Language*, and carries as great a Contrariety to our Religion, as the Worship of *Baal*.

Two Women (whom I suppose to be baptized Christians) represent *Venus* and *Diana*, singing, and celebrating their Lusts and Wantonness, *as the Sweets that Life improve.*

Now

* *Isaiah* xlv. 19.

Now if a common *Prostitute* was to come drunk out of a *Brandy-Shop* singing their Words, she would act like herself. No one could say that she had forgot her Character, or was *singing* one way, and *living* another. And I dare say, there is no *Rake* in the Audience so debauched, as not to think this a sufficient Celebration of the Praises and Happiness of his Pleasures.

But what do other People do here? Is there any Entertainment in this Place for *pious, sober, and devout* Minds? Does it become them to sing the Praises of Debauchery, or sit among those that do?

When we hear of a *Witches Feast*, we do not hear of any but *Witches* that go to it: The Mirth and Joy of such Meetings is left wholly to themselves. Now if these impudent Celebrations of *Venus* and her *Pleasures* were left wholly to *Rakes* and *Prostitutes*; if we reckoned it an Entertainment as contrary to Religion, as a *Witches Feast*; it would only shew, that we judged as rightly in one Case as in the other. And indeed, one would think, that no Christian need to be told, that *Venus* and her *Graces* are as much the Devil's *Machinery*, as *Witches* and *Imps*.

To proceed. If a Person in Conversation was to address himself to a *Modest* Lady in the words of this Entertainment, she would think herself very ill used, and that she ought to resent such Treatment. She would think, that her *Modesty* might well be questioned, if she bore such Language.

But how it is consistent with such *Modesty*, to hire People to entertain her with the same Language in Publick, is a Difficulty not easily to be explained. Can *Fathers* and *Mothers*, who sit here with their Children, recommend Purity to them at home, when they have carried them to hear the Praises of Lewdness, as the *Sweets which Life improve*?

If a Person was to make a publick Harangue in favour of *Image-Worship*, telling us, that it was the finest Means of raising the Heart to a Delight in God, we should

should think him a *very wicked Man*, and that the Ears and Hearts of Christians ought to detest such Discourses. Yet Christian People can meet in Crowds, and give their Money to have repeated in their Ears, what are here said to be *the Sweets which Life improve*. This, it seems, is no *Idolatry*.

We are told in Scripture, that *Covetousness* is *Idolatry*; and the Reason is, because it alienates the Heart from God, and makes it rest in something else. The covetous Man is an *Idolater*, because his Heart says, that *Gain* and *Bags of Gold* are the *Sweets which Life improve*. And can we think that that corrupt Heart, that celebrates *Lust* and *Wantonness*, as the *Sweets which Life improve*, is guilty of *less Idolatry*, than he that says the same thing of Riches? As sure as there is such a Sin as *Idolatry*, as sure as the fordid *Miser* is guilty of it, so sure is it that these words are chargeable, not only with excessive *Immodesty*, but plain *Idolatry*. For how do we think that the *Pagans* worshipped *Venus*? We cannot suppose that it was with *Fasting* and *Prayer*, or any *serious Devotion*. No; they paid her such a Devotion, as the *Stage* now does; they called upon her in *lewd Songs*, and praised her, in praising the Pleasures of Lust and Impurity, in rejoicing in her mighty Power, and celebrating her Pleasures, as the *Sweets which Life improve*.

These Women go on, and with Musick and Voices, as wanton as their Words, are employed to make a deeper Impression on the Hearts of the Audience. Then enter *Bacchus*, *Pan*, and *Silenus*, attended with *Satyrs*, *Fawns* and *Sylvans*.

And indeed, they enter very properly; for the Discourse is very agreeable to their Nature. But what have Christians to do with this Company? Do they come here to *renounce* their Religion? Or can they think that this Society, with the most beastly *Images* that the Heathen World could invent, is a Society that they may partake of without *Renouncing Christ*?

Our Religion charges us, not to *keep company*, if any one that is called a Brother be a fornicator *, &c. But where

* 1 Cor. v. II.

where have we left our Religion, if we not only accompany with People devoted to Impurity, but make their Company our Delight, and *hire* them to entertain us with all the lewd Imaginations that can be invented? If we are not content with this, but *conjure* up all the impure *Fictions* of the Heathen World, and make their *imaginary Deities* more vile and wanton than ever they made them, to render them agreeable to our Christian Minds, shall we reckon this among our *small Sins*? Shall we think it a pardonable Infirmary, or partake of such an Entertainment as this?

The Apostle says, *Ye cannot drink the Cup of the Lord, and the Cup of Devils: Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table, and the Table of Devils* *. And can we think that we are not drinking the Cup of Devils, or that we are not at the Devil's Table, when his most favourite Instruments of Impiety, *Venus, Bacchus, Silenus, Satyrs and Fawns*, are the Company that we meet to be entertained with? If this is not being at the Devll's Table, he had no Table in the Heathen World. For surely, they who call up Devils to their Entertainment, who cannot be enough delighted unless the impious Demons of the Heathen World converse with them, are in a stricter Communication with the Devil, than they who only eat of that Meat which had been offered in Sacrifice.

Our blessed Saviour says, *He that looketh upon a Woman to lust after her, hath already committed Adultery with her in his Heart*. Can we reckon ourselves his Disciples, who hire our Fellow-Christians, and Christian Women, whose chief Ornament is a sincere Modesty, to sing in merry Assemblies such Words as are used in this Entertainment.

Who can say that I carry Matters too high, when I call this *renouncing* Christianity? For, can any Words be more expressly contrary to the Doctrine of our Saviour, and that in so important a Point? And does not he sufficiently renounce Christianity, who renounces so great a Doctrine, that has Christ for its Author?

If we were to make a Jest of the *Sacraments* in our merry Assemblies, we should shew as much Regard to
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* 1 Cor. x. 21.

Christianity, as by such Discourses as these. For all *lewd Discourses* are as plainly contrary to essential Doctrines of Scripture, as any Ridicule upon the Sacraments that can be invented. It may be you could not sit in the *Play-House*, if you saw *Baptism* made a Jest of, and its Use reproached. But pray, why do not you think that there is as much *Profaneness* and *Irreligion* in impudent Speeches and Songs? Has not Christ said as much about *Purity* of Heart, as about either of the *Sacraments*? Has not he made Chastity of Heart as necessary to Salvation as the Sacraments? How comes it then, that an impudent Praise of Lust and Wantonness is not as *profane*, as a ridicule upon the Sacraments? What Rule of Reason or Religion do you go by, when you think it highly sinful to sit and hear the *Sacraments* jested upon, and yet are chearful and delighted with such Songs and Discourses, as ridicule *Chastity* of Heart, and religious *Modesty*? Can you suppose, that in the Eyes of God you appear as a better Christian, than those who make merry with profaning the Sacraments? If you can think this, you must hold that the Sacraments are more essential to Religion than *Purity* of Heart; and that it is more acceptable to God to *wash*, than to be *clean*; more pleasing to him to treat the *Altar* as holy, than to live in *Holiness* of Heart.

The Sacraments have nothing valuable in their own Nature; they are only useful to Christians, and to be treated with Reverence, because Christ has appointed them as Means of Holiness. But Purity and Chastity of Heart is an essential and internal Excellence, that by its own Nature perfects the Soul, and renders it more acceptable to God. To abhor therefore a Jest upon the *Sacraments*, and yet divert ourselves with *impure* Rant, and *lewd* Songs, is being like those who *abhor Idols*, and yet *commit Sacrilege*.

All therefore who partake of this sinful Entertainment, who take their Share of Mirth in such Scences of Impurity and Lewdness, must look upon themselves, not only as Offenders against the Laws of *Purity*, but also as chargeable with such *Irreligion* and *Profaneness*, as they are who

who are merry in such Meetings as ridicule and deride the Use of the Holy Sacraments.

It is a great Aggravation of the Guilt of these Assemblies, that Women are employed to lay aside the peculiar Ornament of their Sex, and to add an Immodesty of Action and Address to immodest Speeches. If we knew of an Assembly, where Clergymen met to ridicule the *sacred Rites* of Religion for the sake of entertaining the Audience with *Eloquence*; if we should find that great Part of the Audience were *Clergymen*, who could not forbear an Entertainment so contrary to their Profession; it would easily be seen, that such a sinful Entertainment was more unreasonable, because Clergymen acted in it, and Clergymen came to be entertained with it.

Now this is the Case of the Stage-Entertainment. Women are as particularly called to a *singular Modesty*, as Clergymen are to the Duties of their Profession. If therefore Women act Parts in lewd and impudent Entertainments, they have as much forgot themselves, and appear as *detestable*, as Clergymen that talk *profanely*. And if other Women come to delight themselves with seeing their *Sisters* acting so contrary to themselves, and the peculiar Duties of their Condition, they as much forget themselves, as those *Clergy* who should meet to see their *Brethren* raise Diversion out of *Profaneness*. When therefore virtuous and prudent Women think they may go to the *Stage*, where Women so openly depart from the Decencies which are necessary to their Sex, let them consider what they would think of such virtuous and prudent Divines, as should meet to see Clergymen openly contradict the Duties of their sacred Office. For it is the same Absurdity, for modest Women to take Pleasure in a Diversion where Women are *immodest*, as for a good Clergyman to be pleased with a Meeting where Clergymen are *profane*. This must be owned to be strictly true, unless it can be shewn, that *Impudence* and *Immodesty* are not so contrary to the Duties of *Women*, as *Profaneness* is contrary to the Duty of a *Clergyman*. For if there is the same Contrariety, then it must be equally monstrous for Women to encourage a Number of Women in an immodest way of

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Life, as for *Bishops* and *Priests* to encourage a Number of Clergymen in a State of *Profaneness*.

Let us now take one Step farther in this Entertainment. The *Stage* has now upon it, *Venus*, *Bacchus*, *Silenus*, *Pan*, *Satyrs*, *Fawns*, *Sylvans*, *Bacchanals*, and *Bacchantes*. Now if there were really such Beings as these, one would not wonder to see them got together. As they have all one common Nature of *Vileness*, they are sufficiently recommended to one another. But is it not astonishing, that these *fictitious Beings*, which are only imaginary Representations of such *Lust*, *Sensuality*, and *Madness*, as never had any real Existence, but were invented by the Devil for the Delusion of the Heathen World, should be preserved to talk their filthy Language to Congregations of *Christians*? And perhaps *Silenus* never so publicly recommended *Lust* and *Impudence* in any Heathen Assembly, as he does here among Christians. For our *Stage* has made him a fine Singer, that his Lewdness may have all the Recommendation which can be had from it.

Surely no one will now think that I carried the Charge too high, when I called the *Play-House* the House of the Devil; for if his *fictitious Beings*, talking his Language, and acting such Parts as they do, be not a sufficient Proof that it is his Work that is here carrying on, it is in vain to pretend to prove any thing: There is no Certainty that two and two are four.

If our Eyes could shew us the *holy Angels* in our Church-Assemblies, it would not be a stronger Proof of the Divine Presence, than the seeing such Images as these and hearing their Language is a Proof that the *Stage* is the Devil's Ground. For how can he more certainly assure us of his Presence in any Place, than by *Satyrs*, *Bacchanals*, *Bacchantes*, and such like Images of Lewdness? He cannot appear to us as a Spirit; he must therefore get such *Beings* as these to appear for him; or, what seems to be more to his Purpose, make deluded Christians supply their Places. If therefore there be any certain Marks of the Devil's Power or Presence in any Assemblies, Places, or Temples of the Heathen World, the same are as certain Marks of his Power and Presence in our *Play-House*.

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Again: Is it any Argument that the *Church* is God's House, because we there meet the *Ministers* of God, who act in his Name; because we there sing divine Hymns, hear holy Instructions, and raise our Hearts unto God and heavenly Matters; is this any Proof that we are then drawn near to God? If therefore there be a Place set apart for *lewd* and *profane* Discourses, where the same Beings are introduced as filled Heathen Temples, where we celebrate their Power, and praise their Being with wanton Songs and impure Rant, and where we open our Hearts to the Impressions of wild and disordered Passions, is not this as certain a Proof, that such a Place must belong to some Being that is *contrary* to God, and that we are then as certainly drawn near to him? He that does not see this with a sufficient Clearness, could never have seen that the Devil had any Power or Worship in the Heathen World. You must therefore observe, the *Play-House* is not called the House of the Devil, only by way of Terror, and to fright you from a bad Place; but it is called so, because it really is so in the strictest fullest Sense of the Words.

Let us now suppose, that the Disorders of the Stage cannot drive you from it; and that you are no more offended at the Meeting of these filthy Dæmons of the Heathen World, than if you was to meet your Friends.

If this be your Case, how will you prove that your Religion has had any Effect upon you, or that it has done you the least good? For if the same Lewdness and Immorality please you, which pleased the Worshippers of *Venus*; if you delight in such *Rant* and *Madness*, as was the Delight of *Bacchanals*, and *Bacchantes*, is not this a Proof that you have the same *Heart* and *Temper* that they had? And if you are like Idolaters in that which constituted their Idolatry, have you any Reason to think that Christianity has had any Effect upon you? It would even be *Profaneness* in any one to pretend to the true Spirit of Christianity, so long as he can take pleasure in such an Entertainment as this. For what is there that is unlike to the Spirit of Christ, if this is not? Who that can rejoice in the Lewdness and Bestiality of *Silenus*, and the impure Rant of vile Dæmons, can make any Pretences to a reasonable Piety? Does this Company look as if we

had any thing holy and divine in our Tempers ? Is this living in the Spirit of Christ ? Is this the way to be as the Angels of God when we die ? Shall we go from the Pleasures of *Bacchus*, *Silenus*, *Bacchanals*, and *Bacchantes*, to the Choir of blessed Spirits that are Above ? Is there any Reasonableness or Fitness in these Things ? Why should we think, that such a Life as this will have an End so contrary to it ?

We reckon it strange Grossness of Mind in the *Turks*, to expect a *Paradise* of carnal Delights. But what a Degree of Grossness is it in us, to know the God of Purity, and hope for a Heaven which only the *pure in Heart* shall enjoy, and yet call up all the vile *Fictions* of Lust and Sensuality that corrupted the Heathen World to entertain our Hearts, that from their Mouths we may hear the Praises of Debauchery and Wantonness ? Let any one but consider this, as every thing ought to be considered, by the pure Light of Reason and Religion, and he will find that the Use of the Stage may be reckoned amongst our worst Sins, and that it is as great a Contradiction to our Religion, as any Corruption or vile Practice of the Heathen World.

I have made these few Reflections upon this Entertainment, not because it exceeds the ordinary Wickedness of the Stage, but for the contrary Reason, because it is far short of it, and is much less offensive than most of our *Plays*. That by shewing the *Stage* to be so impious and detestable, so contradictory to all Christian Piety, in an Entertainment that is moderate, if compared with almost all our *Plays*, there might be no room left for sober Christians to be at any Peace with it. They who would see how much the Impieties of the Stage exceed what I have here observed of this Entertainment, may consult Mr. *Collier's* short View of the Stage, Sir *Richard Blackmore's* Essays, and *A serious Remonstrance*, &c. by Mr. *Bedford*.

To return: *Levis* hears all these Arguments against the *Stage*; he owns they are very plain, and strictly prove all that they pretend to; he does not offer one word against them; but still *Levis* has an Answer for them *all*, without answering any *one* of them. " I have, says he, my

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“ own Experience, that these Diversions never did me any hurt, and therefore I shall use them.”

But *Levis* does not consider, that this very Answer shews, that he is very much hurt by them; that they have so much disordered his Understanding, that he will defend his Use of them in the most absurd manner imaginable, rather than be driven from them by any Arguments from Religion. For how can a Man shew that he is more hurt by any Practice, or that it has more blinded and perverted his Mind, than by appealing to his own inward Experience in Defence of it, against the plain Nature and Reason of things? Let *Levis* look at this way of reasoning in other Matters. If a Person that prays in an *unknown Tongue*, should disregard all the Arguments that are brought to shew the Absurdity of it, and rest contented with saying, that it never hurt his Devotion, but that he was as much affected in that way, as he could possibly be in any other, *Levis* would certainly tell such a one, that he had lost his Understanding, and that his long Use of such absurd Devotions made him talk so absurdly about them.

Again: If a Worshipper of *Images* was, in Answer to the Second Commandment, only to say, that he had his own Experience that he found no hurt by them; and that he had the same Devotion of Heart to God, as if he did not worship *Images*; Or, suppose another Person to keep very ill Company; and when he is told that *Evil communications corrupt good manners*, should content himself with saying, that he would still use the same ill Company, because he was sure it did him no hurt, nor made any Impression upon him: Now as *Levis* would be sure that a Man was notoriously hurt by the Worship of *Images*, that should thus blindly defend them, and that the other is sufficiently hurt by ill Company, who should so obstinately stick to it, so he ought to be as sure, that he himself is sufficiently hurt either by Plays, or something else, when with an equal Blindness he defends his Use of them.

Farther: When *Levis* says, that he is sure that the Use of Plays does him no harm, let him consider what he means by that Speech. Does he mean, that though

he uses the Diversion of the Stage, yet he finds himself in the true State of Religion; that he has all those holy Tempers in that degree of Perfection which Christianity requires? Now if he cannot say this; how can he say, he is sure that Plays do him no harm? If a Person was to affirm, that Intemperance did him no hurt, it would be expected that he should own that he was in a perfect State of Health: For if he had any Disorder or ill Habit of Body, he could not say, that his Intemperance did not contribute towards it. In like manner, if *Levis* will maintain that Plays do no ways disorder him, or corrupt his Heart; he must affirm, that he has no Disorder or Corruption of Heart belonging to him; for if he has, he cannot say that the Use of Plays does not contribute towards it.

When therefore *Levis* says, Plays do me no harm at all; it is the same thing as if he had said, I have no Disorder at all upon me; my Heart and all my Tempers are in that exact State of Purity and Perfection that they should be.

Again: Let *Levis* consider, that his Taste and Relish of the Stage is a Demonstration that he is already hurt by something or other; and that his Heart is not in a right State of Religion. *Levis* thinks this is a very censorious Accusation, because he is known to be a very good Churchman, to live a regular Life for the most part, to be charitable, and a Well-wisher to all good Designs. All this is true of *Levis*: But then it is as strictly true, that his Taste for Plays is a Demonstration, that his Heart is not in a right State of Religion. For does *Levis* think, that his frequenting the Church is any Sign of the State of his Heart? Am I to believe, that he has inward Dispositions that suit with the holy Strains of Divine Service, because he likes to be at Church? I grant, I am to believe this; there is good Reason for it. But then, if *Levis* uses the *Play-House*, if the disordered Passions, the lewd Images, the profane Rant, and immodest Parts that are there acted, are a Pleasure to him, is not this as strong a Demonstration, that he has some Dispositions and Tempers that suit with these Disorders? If

If I am to conclude any thing from a Man's liking and frequenting Divine Service, is there not as certain a Conclusion to be drawn from a Man's liking and using the Stage? For the Stage can no more be liked, without having some inward Corruptions that are suitable to the Disorders that are there represented, than the Divine Service can be a Pleasure to any one, that has no Holiness or Devotion in his Heart.

It is infallibly certain, that all Pleasures shew the *State* and *Condition* of our Minds; and that nothing can please us, but what suits with some Dispositions and Tempers that are within us; so that when we see a Man's Pleasures, we are sure that we see a great deal of his Nature. All *Forms* of Life, all *outward* Actions, may deceive us. We cannot absolutely say, that People have such Tempers because they do such Actions; but wherever People place any *Delight*, or receive any *Pleasures*, there we have an infallible Token of something in their Nature, and of what Tempers they have within them.

Diversions therefore and Pleasures, which are reckoned such uncertain Means of judging of the *State* of Mens Minds, are of all Means the most certain; because nothing can please us, or affect us, but what is according to our Nature, which finds something within us that is suitable to it. Had we not inward Dispositions of *Tenderness* and *Compassion*, we should not find ourselves softened and moved with *miserable* Objects. Had we not something *harmonious* in our Nature, we should not find ourselves pleased with Strains of *Music*. In like manner, had we not in our Nature lively Seeds of all those Disorders which are acted upon the Stage, were there not some *inward Corruption* that finds itself gratified by all the irregular Passions that are there represented, we should find no more Pleasure in the Stage, than blind Men find in *Pictures*, or deaf Men in *Music*.

And, on the other Hand, if we were full of the contrary Tempers, were our Hearts full of Affections contrary to those on the *Stage*, were we deeply affected with Desires of Purity and Holiness, we should find ourselves as much offended with all that passes upon the Stage, as *mild* and *gentle* Natures are offended at the Sight of *Cruelty*

and *Barbarity*. These Things are of the utmost Certainty.

All People therefore, who use the *Stage*, have as much Assurance that their Heart is not in a right State of Religion, as they possibly can have of any thing that relates to themselves.

I hope, none of my Readers will think this too general, or too rash an Assertion; but that they will rather observe, that it is founded on such Evidence of Reason as cannot be rejected, without rejecting every thing that is plain and certain in Human Nature. They must not think it a sufficient Answer to this, to consider either how good they are themselves, or how many excellent Persons they know who do not abstain from the *Stage*. For this is a way of Reasoning, that is not allowed in any other Case.

Now when it is affirmed, that all Persons who are pleased with the *Stage* must have some Corruptions of Heart, that are gratified with the corrupt Passions which are there acted, is not this as plain and evident, as if it was said, that all who are pleased with seeing barbarous Actions, must have some Seeds of Barbarity in their Nature? If you are delighted with the Stroke of the *Whip*, and love to see the *Blood* fly, is it not past all doubt, that you have a Barbarity within you? And if *impure* Speeches, if *wanton* Amours, if *wild* Passions, and *immoral* Rant, can give you any Delight, is it not equally past all doubt, that you have something of all these Disorders in your Nature? Is it any more uncharitable to affirm this, than to affirm, that all who love to see the *Blood* fly have something barbarous in their Nature? Is there any more Rashness or Severity in it, than in saying, that all who love such or such Strains of *Music* have some Disposition in their Nature that is gratified by them?

It signifies nothing therefore to say, that you know such or such excellent Persons who are pleased with the *Stage*, whom no one ought to suspect to be defective in Piety; it is as absurd as to say, that you know excellent Persons who are pleased with seeing barbarous Actions, whom no one ought to suspect to be defective in *Tenderness*. If you delight in barbarous Sight, and are pleased with the Groans and Pains of the Afflicted, I do not sus-
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pect you to be defective in *Tenderness*, you have put your Case out of all Suspicion, you have proved that you have a Barbarity in your Nature. So if you delight in the *Stage*, if you taste and relish its Entertainment, I do not *suspect* you to be defective in Piety; you have put your Case beyond Suspicion; you have proved that you have Dispositions in your Nature, that are gratified by the disorderly Passions of the *Stage*.

Again, consider it in another View: How is it possible that any one should delight in the *Stage*, but through a Defect in Piety? For is not the *Stage* guilty of Impurity, Profaneness, Blasphemy, and Immorality? Now though People may differ about the Degree in which they will make this Charge, yet all must own it in some degree. Now if the Charge be but true in *any degree*, must there not be a Want of Piety in those that can partake of an Entertainment chargeable with *Impurity, Profaneness, and Immorality*? If People were so pious that they could not bear such an Entertainment as this, if nothing could persuade them to be present at it, this would be no Proof that they were Saints; for to abhor an Entertainment loaded with so much Guilt, is but a small Instance of an advanced Piety. But surely, if they can not only bear it, but be pleased with it, it is Proof enough, that their Hearts want several Degrees of Piety which become Christians. Besides, can pious Persons, who use the *Stage*, tell you of any *one Play* for this forty or fifty Years, that has been free from *wild Rant, immodest Passions, and profane Language*? Must they not therefore be defective in Piety, who partake of a Diversion that is at *no time* free from this Guilt in some degree or other? But supposing there was such a thing as an *innocent Play* once or twice in an Age (which is like supposing *innocent Lust, sober Rant, or harmless Profaneness*) could this make it at all allowable for pious Persons to use the *Stage*? Could this be any Proof that Persons of real Piety might take Pleasure in it? For could it be consistent with an enlivened Piety to use a Diversion, which in its *common ordinary State* is full of monstrous Impiety and Profaneness, because it sometimes happened in a Number of Years, that it might be innocent for a Day or two? But even this does not happen. The *Stage* never has

one innocent Play; not one can be produced that ever you saw acted in *either House*, but what abounds with *Thoughts, Passions, and Language*, contrary to Religion. Is there therefore any Rashness or Severity in saying, That Persons who use a Diversion, which in its *ordinary* State is full of monstrous Wickedness and Impiety, and in its *best* State is never free from Variety of Sin, must be defective in Piety? How can we know any thing with Clearness and Evidence, if we know not this to be clear and evident? For surely it is a necessary Part of Piety to abhor Lewdness, Immorality, or Profaneness, wherever they are; but they who are so pious, as not to be able to be pleased where any of those are, have a Piety that will not permit them ever to see a Play.

There is no Doctrine of our Blessed Saviour, that more concerns all Christians, or is more essential to their Salvation, than this: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* Now take the *Stage* in its best State, when some admired *Tragedy* is upon it, are the *extravagant Passions* of distracted Lovers, the *impure Ravings* of inflamed Heroes, the *Joys and Torments* of Love, and *gross Descriptions* of Lust; are the *indecent Actions*, the *amorous Transports*, the *wanton Address* of the Actors, which make so great a Part of the *most sober and modest* Tragedies; are these things consistent with this Christian Doctrine of *Purity of Heart*? You may as well imagine, that *Murder* and *Rapine* are consistent with *Charity* and *Meekness*.

It is therefore as necessary, as reasonable, and as consistent with Christian Charity, to tell *Levis* that his Use and Delight in the *Stage* is as certain a Proof of his want of Piety, as to tell the same thing to a malicious, intemperate, or revengeful Person. Some People who are guilty of Personal Vices may have some Violence of Temptation, some natural Disorder to plead in their Excuse; they perhaps may be so tender as to desire to conceal them, and be afraid to encourage others in the like Practices; but the Use and Encouragement of the *Stage* has no Excuses of this kind; it has no *Infirmity*, *Surprise*, or *Violence* of Temptation, to appeal to; it shews no *Tenderness* of Mind, or *Concern* for others, but is a deliberate, continued, open and publick Declaration in favour of *Lewdness, Immorality, and Profaneness*. Let any one

one but collect, not all the Wickedness that has appeared on the Stage since he first used it, but only so much as passes there in *any one* Season, and then he will see what a dreadful Load of Guilt he has brought upon himself. For surely no one can be so weak as to imagine, that he can use and encourage a wicked Entertainment, without making himself a *full Sharer* of all its Wickedness.

Archbishop Tillotson treats the Stage in this manner. 'I shall now speak a few Words concerning *Plays*, which, as they are now ordered among us, are a *mighty Reproach* to the Age and Nation.— As now the Stage is, they are *intolerable*, and not fit to be permitted in a *civilized*, much less a *Christian Nation*. They do most *notoriously* minister to Infidelity and Vice.— And therefore I do not see how any Person *pretending* to Sobriety and Virtue, and especially to the *pure and holy* Religion of our Blessed Saviour, can without great *Guilt*, and open *Contradiction* to his holy Profession, be present at such lewd and immodest Plays, as too many are; who yet would take it very ill to be shut out of the Community of Christians, as they would most certainly have been in the first and purest Ages of Christianity*.'

Here let it be observed, that this Archbishop, who has generally been reckoned eminent for his *Moderation*, and *gentle* manner of treating every thing, says of Plays, that they are a *mighty Reproach* to the Nation; that they are *intolerable*, and not fit to be permitted in a *Civilized*, much less a *Christian Nation*; that they *notoriously* minister to *Infidelity* and *Vice*.

Now this, I suppose, is as high a Charge, as he would have brought against the worst Articles of *Popery*. If I have said, that People cannot use the *Stage* without being defective in Piety, I have not said it in a declaiming way, but have asserted it from Variety of plain Arguments: But this great Man, so much admired for his *tender* Remarks upon *Persons* and *Things*, goes much farther. He does not say, that People of real and advanced Piety cannot use the *Stage*, but he makes it inconsistent with so much as *pretending* to *Sobriety and Virtue*, much less the *Purity* of the *holy Religion* of our Blessed Saviour.

* Sermon upon corrupt Communication.

viour. He does not say, that such People cannot be Excellent and Exemplary Christians, or that they must be defective in Piety, but he charges them with *great Guilt*, and *open Contradiction* to their holy Religion, and assures them, that if they had lived in the *first* and *purest* Ages of Christianity, they would have been excommunicated.

I have appealed to this *great Name*, for no other End, but to prevent the charge of Uncharitableness. For surely, if such an eminent Instance of a *charitable* and *gentle* Spirit can roundly affirm, that the Use of such a *Stage* as ours is an *open Contradiction* to Christianity, and such a scandalous Offence, as would certainly have been punished in the first and purest Ages of the Church with the dreadful Punishment of Excommunication; surely it can be no Proof of an *uncharitable Spirit* in me, that I shew by Variety of Arguments, that the Use of such a *Stage* cannot consist with the true Spirit of Christianity, but that there must be *some Defect* in their Piety, who are able to use it.

Jucunda resolves in great Chearfulness to hear no Arguments against the *Stage*: She says it can be but a *small Sin*; and considering the Wickedness of the Age, that Person is in a very good State, that is only guilty of going to Plays. Desire her ever so often only to consider the plainest Arguments in the World, she puts all off with only this Reply, *God send I may have no greater Sin to answer for, than seeing a Play!*

Jucunda thinks a Clergyman would do better, to insist only upon the material Parts of Religion, and not lay so much Stress upon Things that are only *Diversions*, lest by making Religion to contradict People in every thing, Religion itself should be brought into Dislike. *Jucunda* desires, that she may be instructed in some greater Things, than the Sinfulness of going to a *Play*; for she is resolved to hear no more of that.

But pray, *Jucunda*, consider all that you have here said. You say it can be but a *small Sin*. How is it that you know it is but a *small Sin*? What care have you taken to understand its true Magnitude? You shut your Eyes, and stop your Ears, and resolve against all Information about it, and then call it a *small Sin*. But suppose it was but

a *small Sin*; is that a Reason why you should be guilty of it? Does the Smallness of Sins recommend them to your Choice? Our blessed Saviour says *, *If thy foot offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell-fire.* Now this passage, I suppose, does not mean, If thou art guilty of some great Sin, either of *Murder*, *Perjury*, or the like, thou must cut them off. For the Comparison of a *Foot* and an *Eye*, must signify something that is not directly sinful in itself, but only dangerous in its Use; as it sets us too near to some Sins, or is become too full of Temptation. Yet such Ways of Life as these, which are only dangerous, and expose our Virtue to too great a Hazard, however pleasant and useful, though like an *Eye*, or *Foot*, are yet to be entirely cut off, that we may not fall into Hell-fire. Can it be supposed that *Jucunda* is of this Religion, who pleases herself with a Diversion, because it is but a *small Sin*? Will she ever think of saving herself by cutting off a *Foot*, or plucking out an *Eye*?

Indeed, to talk of a *small Sin*, is like talking of a *small Law* of God: For as there is no *Law* of God but is a *great* one, because it comes from God, so every Sin, as it is a Transgression of some Law of God, must needs be a great one. There may be Sins that have a smaller degree of Guilt, because they are committed through *Infirmity*, *Ignorance*, or *Surprise*; but no Sin is small, that is either carelessly or wilfully continued in. If it be a Sin therefore to use the *Stage*, it cannot be a *small one*, because it has none of those Circumstances which render a Sin a small one. It becomes a very great one to *Jucunda*, because she carelessly and wilfully resolves to continue in it, merely for the sake of a little Diversion.

Let *Jucunda* consider again, what she means by wishing that she may have no greater Sin to answer for than going to a Play. It is a Wish that is silly in itself, because she is not to wish to die in small Sins, but in a perfect Repentance and Abhorrence of all kind of Sin; but it is much sillier still, when it is given as a Reason for going to

* Mark ix. 45, 47.

to a *Play*. For it is saying, *I expect to die guilty of greater Sins than of going to a Play, and therefore there is no Occasion to forbear from that*. Now if she understands herself, she must know, that this is the plain Meaning of her Words. Yet who that understands any thing of Religion, or that has any Desire of Holiness, can talk at this rate? It is a Language that is fitter for an *Atheist*, than for a Person that is but *half* a Christian. If a Tradesman that allows himself only to lie in the Prices of his Goods, should content himself with saying, *God send I may have no greater Sin to answer for*, no one would suppose him to be much concerned about Religion. Yet as many Christian Reasons might be produced, to shew these Lies to be but small Sins, as to shew that the Use of the Stage is but a *small Sin*.

Jucunda would have a *Clergyman* insist upon the most material Parts of Religion, and not lay so much stress upon Things that are only Diversions. I am of your mind, *Jucunda*, that a *Clergyman* ought to insist upon the most material Parts of Religion; but then it does not follow, that he must not lay much Stress upon things that are *Diversions*. For as something that is called a Diversion may be entirely sinful, so if this should happen, it is as necessary for a *Clergyman* to call all Christians from it, as it is necessary to exhort them to keep the Commandments. Religion seems to have as little to do with *Trades*, as with *Diversions*; yet if a Trade be set up, that is in its own Nature wicked, there is nothing more material in Religion, than to declare the Necessity of forsaking such an Employment. But after all, *Jucunda*, the most essential, and most *material* Parts of Religion, are such as relate to *common Life*, such as alter our Ways of living, such as give Rules to all our Actions, and are the Measure of all our Conduct, whether in Business or Diversion. Nothing is so important in Religion to you, as that which makes you sober and wise, holy and heavenly minded, in the whole Course of your Life. But you are for such *material Parts* of Religion, as should only distinguish you from a *Jew* or an *Infidel*, but make no Difference in common Life betwixt you and *Fops* and *Coquets*. You are for a Religion that consists in Modes and Forms of Worship, that is tied to *Times* and *Places*,
that

that only takes up a little of your time on *Sundays*, and leaves you all the Week to do as you please. But all this, *Jucunda*, is nothing. The Scripture has not said in vain, *He that is in Christ is a new Creature*. All the Law and the Gospel are in vain to you; all Sacraments, Devotions, Doctrines, and Ordinances, are to no purpose, unless they make you this *new Creature* in all the Actions of your Life. He teaches you the most material Parts of Religion, who teaches you to be of a *religious Spirit* in every thing that you do; who teaches you to eat and drink, to labour and rest, to converse and divert yourself in such degrees, and to such ends, as best promote a pious Life.

If *Sots* and *Gluttons* should desire a *Clergyman* to insist upon the most material Parts of Religion, and not lay so great a stress upon *Gluttony* and *Intemperance*, which are things that only relate to *eating* and *drinking*, they would shew that they understood Religion as well as *Jucunda*. For every one must see, that *some Diversions* may as much disorder the Heart, and be as contrary to Religion, as *Gluttony* and *Intemperance*. And perhaps as many People have lived and died unaffected with Religion, through a Course of *Diversions* and *Pleasures*, as through *Gluttony* and *Intemperance*.

If it displeases People to be told, that Religion is to prescribe Rules to their *Diversions*, they are as unreasonable as those are, who are displeased that Religion should prescribe Rules to their Tempers, and Passions, and Inclinations. For as *Diversions* are only the Gratifications of our Tempers, so if Religion is to forbear us in our *Diversions*, it is to forbear our Tempers, Passions, and Inclinations. But the Truth is, we ought to be more religiously cautious and watchful about our *Diversions*, than any other Part of common Life, not only because they take such deep hold of us, but because they have no necessary Foundation in Nature, but are our own Inventions. *Trade* and *Business*, though they are necessary for great Ends of Life, are yet to be subject to the strictest Rules of Religion; surely therefore *Diversions*, which are but like so many *Blanks* in Life, that are only invented to get rid of Time, surely such things ought of all others to have no mixture of any thing that is sinful in them.

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For if the thing itself be hardly pardonable, surely it must be a high Crime to add to it the Sin of doing it in a sinful manner. For as Diversions are at best only Methods of losing Time, the most innocent have something in them that seems to want a Pardon; but if we cannot be content with such as only pass away our Hours, unless they gratify our disordered Passions, we are like those who are not content to sleep away their time, unless they can add the Pleasure of sinful Dreams.

Jucunda therefore is much mistaken, if she thinks that Religion has nothing to do with her Diversions, for there is nothing that requires a more religious Exactness than they do. If we are wrong in them, it is the same thing as if we are wrong in our Religion, or sinful in our Business. Nay, Sin in our Diversions is less excusable, and perhaps does us more harm than in any thing else. For such as our Diversions are, such are we ourselves. If Religion therefore is to have any Power over us, if it is to enter into our Hearts, and alter and reform the State of our Souls, the greatest Work that it has to do, is to remove us from such Pleasures and Ways of Life as nourish and support a wrong State of our Souls.

If dying Sinners that go out of the World under a Load of Guilt could see what brought them into that State, it would often be found, that all their Sins, and Impieties, and Neglect of Duty, were solely owing to their Diversions; and perhaps were they to live their Lives over again, there would be no other possible way of living better than they had done, but by renouncing such ways of Life as were only looked upon as Diversions and Amusements.

People of Fashion and Quality have great Advantage above the Vulgar; their Condition and Education gives them a Liveliness and Brightness of Parts, from whence one might justly expect a more exalted Virtue. How comes it then, that we see as ill *Morals*, as open *Impiety*, as little *religious Wisdom*, and as great *Disorders* among them, as among the most rude uneducated Part of the World? It is because the *Politeness* of their Lives, their Course of Diversions and Amusements, and their Ways of spending their Time, as much extinguishes the *Wisdom* and *Light* of Religion, as the Grossness and Ignorance of the

the dullest Part of the World. A poor Creature that is doomed to a stupid Conversation, that sees nothing but *Drudgery*, and *Eating*, *Drinking*, and *Sleeping*, is as likely to have his Soul aspire to God; and aim at an exalted Virtue, as another that is always in the Brightness and Gaiety of polite Pleasures. It is the same thing, whether the *good Seed* be burnt up with the Heat and Brightness of the *Sun*, or be lost in *Mud*. Many Persons that live and die in a *Mine*, that are confined to Drudgery and Darkness, are just so fatally destroyed by their way of Life, as others that live in a Circle of Pleasures and polite Engagements are destroyed by their way of Life. Every one sees and owns the Effects of such a gross way of Life; it is not usual to expect any thing wise, or holy, or truly great, from Persons that live and die digging *Coals*. But then it is not enough considered, that there are other ways of Life, of a contrary Appearance, that as certainly and unavoidably produce the same Effects. For a Heart that is devoted to *polite* Pleasures, that is taken up with a Succession of vain and corrupt *Diversions*, that is employed in *Assemblies*, *Gaming*, *Plays*, *Balls*, and such like Business of a *genteel* Life, is as much disposed of, and taken as far out of the way of true Religion, and a divine and holy Life, as if it had been shut up in a *Mine*. These are plain and certain Truths, if there is any thing plain and certain, either in the Nature of Religion, or the Nature of Man. Who expects Piety from a *Tavern*, that lives among the Rudeness, Noise, and Intemperance of an *Ale-House*? Who expects Christian Holiness from a *Juggler*, that goes about with his *Cups* and *Balls*? Yet why is not this as reasonable, as to expect Piety and Christian Holiness from a *fine Gentleman* that lives at a *Gaming-Table*? Is there any more reason to look for Christian Fortitude, divine Tempers, or religious Greatness of Mind, in this State of Life? Had such a one been born in low Life with the same turn of Mind, it had in all probability fixed him in an *Ale-House*, or furnished him with *Cups* and *Balls*.

The sober honest Employments of Life, and the reasonable Cares of every Condition in the World, make it sufficiently difficult for People to live enough to God, and to act with such holy and wise Tempers as Religion requires. But if we make our Wealth and Fortunes the

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Gratifications of idle and disordered Passions, we may make it as difficult to be saved in a State of *Politeness* and *Gentility*, as in the *basest* Occupations of Life.

Religion requires a steady resolute Use of our best Understanding, and an earnest Application to God for the Light and Assistance of his Holy Spirit.

It is only this watchful Temper, that is full of Attention to every thing that is right and good, that watches over our Minds, and guards our Hearts, that desires Wisdom, and constantly calls upon God for the Light and Joy of his holy Spirit; it is this Temper alone that can preserve us in any true State of Christian Holiness. There is no Possibility of having our Minds strengthened and fixed in wise and reasonable Judgements, or our Hearts full of good and regular Motions, but by living in such a *way of Life*, as assists and improves our Mind, and prepares and disposes us to receive the Spirit of God. This is as certainly the *one only* way to Holiness, as there is but one God that is Holy. Religion can no more subsist in a trifling vain Spirit, that lives by Humour and Fancy, that is full of Levity and Impertinence, wandering from Passion to Passion, giddy with silly Joys, and burdened with impertinent Cares, it can no more subsist with this State of the Soul, than it can dwell in a Heart *devoted* to Sin.

Any way of Life therefore that darkens our Minds, that misemploys our Understanding, that fills us with a trifling Spirit, that disorders our Passions, that separates us from the Spirit of God, is the same certain Road to Destruction, whether it arises from stupid *Sensuality*, rude *Ignorance*, or polite *Pleasures*. Had any one therefore the Power of an *Apostle*, or the Tongue of an Angel, he could not employ it better, than in censuring and condemning those ways of Life, which *Wealth*, *Corruption*, and *Politeness*, have brought among us. We indeed only call them Diversions; but they do the whole Work of *Idolatry* and *Infidelity*, and fill People with so much Blindness and Hardness of Heart, that they neither live by Wisdom, nor feel the want of it, but are content to play away their Lives, as regardless of every thing that is wise, and holy, and divine, as if they were mere *Birds*, or *Animals*, and as thoughtless of Death, and Judgment, and Eternity, as if these were Things that had no Relation to human Life.

Now

Now all this Blindness and Hardness of Heart is owing to that way of Life which People of Fortune generally fall into. It is not gross Sins, it is not *Murder*, or *Adultery*, but it is their *Gentility* and *Politeness* that destroys them: It fills them with such Passions and Pleasures, as quite extinguish the gentle Light of Reason and Religion. For if Religion requires a sober Turn of Mind; if we cannot be reasonable, but by subduing and governing our blind Tempers and Passions; if the most necessary Enjoyments of Life require great Caution and Sobriety, that our Souls be not made earthly and sensual by them; what way of Life can so waste and destroy our Souls, so strengthen our Passions, and disorder our Hearts, as a Life of such Diversions, Entertainments, and Pleasures, as are the *Business* of great Part of the World?

If Religion is to reform our Souls, to deliver us from the Corruption of our Nature, to restore the divine Image, and fill us with such Tempers of Purity and Perfection, as may fit us for the Eternal Enjoyment of God, what is the polite Part of the World doing? For how can any one more resist such a Religion as this; how can more renounce the Grace of God, and hinder the Recovery of the Divine Image, than by living in a Succession of such Enjoyments, as the Generality of People of Fashion are devoted to? For no one who uses the *Stage* has any more Reason to expect to grow in the Grace of God, or to be enlightned and purified by his Holy Spirit, than he that never uses any Devotion. So that it is not to be wondered at, if the Spirit and Power of Religion is wanted, where People so live, as neither to be fit to receive, nor able to co-operate with the Assistance and Light of God's Holy Spirit.

We are taught, that *Charity covereth a multitude of sins*; and that *alms shall purge away sins*. Now let this teach some People how to judge of the Guilt of those Gifts and Contributions, which are given contrary to Charity. I do not mean such Money, as is idly and impertinently squandered away, but such *Gifts* and *Contributions* as are to support People in a wicked Life. For this is so great a Contradiction to Charity, that it must certainly have

Effects contrary to it : It must as much cover our *Virtues*, as Charity covers our Sins.

It is no strange Thing, to hear of *Ladies* taking care of a *Benefit-Night* in the Play-House. But surely they never reflect upon what they are doing. For if there is any Blessing that attends Charity, there must as great a Curse attend such Liberalities, as are to reward People for their Wickedness, and make them happy and prosperous in an unchristian Profession. How can they expect the Blessings of God, or to have their Virtues and Charities placed to their Account, when they have blotted them out, by their Contributions and Generosities to the most open Enemies of the Purity and Holiness of *Christ's Religion*? He that is thus in the Interest of the Play-House, is most openly against God, and is as certainly opposing Religion; he that rewards those that labour in the Cause of Infidelity.

It is no uncharitable Assertion to affirm, that a Player cannot be a living Member of Christ, or in a true State of Grace, till he renounces his Profession with a sincere and deep Repentance. Christianity no more allows such Plays and Players as ours are; than it allows the grossest Vices. They are Objects of no other Charity or Kindness, than such as may reduce them to a sincere Repentance. What a Guilt therefore do they bring upon themselves, who make Players their Favourites, and public Objects of their Care and Generosity; who cannot be in the Favour of God, till they cease to be such as they encourage them to be, till they renounce that Life for which they esteem and reward them?

When an Object of *Distress* is offered to People, it is common to see them very scrupulous in their Charity; they seem to think there may be such a thing as a blameable Charity; they desire to know whether the Person be worthy, whether his Distress is not owing to his Follies and Extravagancies, that they may not relieve such a one as ought to feel the Punishment of his Follies. But what must we say to these things, if those who are thus nice in their *Alms* are yet unreasonable in their *Generosities*; who are afraid of assisting a poor Man, till every thing can be said in his Favour, and yet eager to make another rich,

rich, who is only recommended by his Follies ? What shall we say to these things, if Persons who have so many Rules to govern and restrain their Piety to poor Men, have yet no Rules to govern their Liberalities and Kindness to Libertines, if they should have a *Benefit-Night* upon their hands, not to relieve the Poverty, but to reward the *Merit* of a Player, that he may have the Substance of a *Gentleman* from Christians, for a way of Life that would be a Reproach to a sober Heathen ? Shall we reckon this among our small Offences ? Is this a pardonable Instance of the Weakness of human Nature ? Is it not rather an undeniable Proof, that Christianity has no hold of our Reason and Judgment ? And that we must be born again from such a State of Heart as this, before we can enter into the Spirit of Christianity ?

I have now only one thing to desire of the Reader, not that he would like and approve of these Reflections; but that he will not suffer himself to dislike or condemn them, till he has put his Arguments into Form, and knows how many Doctrines of Scripture he can bring against those things that I have asserted. So far as he can shew that I have reasoned wrong, or mistook the Doctrine of Scripture, so far he has a Right to censure. But *general Dislikes* are mere *Temper*s, as blind as *Passions*, and are always the strongest where Reasons are most wanted. If People will dislike because they will, and condemn Doctrines only because it suits better with their *Temper*s and *Practices*, than to consider and understand them to be true, they act by the same Spirit of *Papery* as is most remarkable in the *lowest Bigots*, who are resolute in a *general Dislike* of all *Protestant* Doctrines, without suffering themselves to consider and understand upon what Truth they are founded.

I can easily imagine that some People will censure these Doctrines, as proceeding from a *rigid, uncharitable Temper*, because they seem to condemn so great a Part of the World. Had I wrote a Treatise against *Covetousness*, or *Intemperance*, it had certainly condemned great Part of the World; but surely he must have strangely forgot himself, that should make that a Reason of accusing me of an uncharitable Temper. Such People should consider also, that a Man cannot assert the Doctrines of *Christian Charity* and *Meekness* themselves, without condemning

a very great Part of the World. But would it be an Instance of an uncharitable Spirit, to preach up the Necessity of an universal Charity, because it might condemn a very great Part of the World? And if the *Holiness* of Christianity cannot be asserted, without condemning the Pleasures and Entertainments of the fashionable Part of the World, is there any more Uncharitableness in this, than in asserting the Doctrine of universal Love? Does this any more shew an *unchristian rigid* Spirit, than when the beloved Apostle said, *All that is in the World, the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life, is not of the Father, but is of the World?*

But I shall not now consider any more Objections, but leave all that I have said to the Conscience and Reason of every Person. Let him but make Reason and Religion the Measure of his Judgment, and then he is as favourable to me as I desire him to be.

It is very common and natural for People to struggle hard, and be loth to own any thing to be wrong that they have long practised. Many People will see so much Truth in these Arguments against the *Stage*, that they will wish in their own Minds that they had always forborn it. But then finding that they cannot assent to these Arguments, without taking a great deal of Blame to themselves, they will find strong Inclinations to condemn the plainest Reasonings, rather than condemn themselves. Let but a Person forget that he has any Guilt in relation to the *Stage*, let him but suppose that he has never been there, and that he will go or stay away, just as he finds Reason, when he has examined all that can be said against it, let a Man but put himself in this State of Mind, and then he will see all the Arguments against the *Stage* as plain and convincing, as any that can be brought against the grossest Vices.

If we could look into the Minds of the several Sorts of Readers, we should see how differently People are affected with Arguments, according to the State that they are in. We should see how they, who have never used the *Stage*, consent with the whole Force of their Minds, and see the Certainty and Plainness of every Argument against it. We should see others struggling and contending against all Conviction, in proportion to the Use that they have made

made of the *Stage*. They that have been its Friends and Advocates, and constant Admirers, will hate the very Name of a Book that is written against it, and will condemn every Argument, without knowing what it is. They who have used the *Stage* much, though in a less degree than this, will perhaps vouchsafe to read a Book against it; but they will read with Fear, they will strive not to be convinced, and be angry at every Argument, for proving so much as it does. Others, that have used the *Stage* in the most moderate degrees, have yet great Prejudices: They perhaps will own, that the *Stage* is blameable, and that it is very well to persuade People from it: But then, these People will not assent to the whole Truth. They will not condemn the *Stage*, as they ought, because having been there sometimes themselves, it suits better with their own Practice only to condemn it in the general, than to declare it to be sinful in such a degree, as should condemn those who ever use it.

These are the several Difficulties, which this Treatise has to contend with: It is to oppose an evil Practice, and charge it with *such a Degree* of Guilt, as few can consent to, without taking some Part of that Guilt to themselves.

I have mentioned these several Degrees of Prejudice, to put People upon suspecting themselves, and trying the *Stage* of their Hearts. For the only way to be wise and reasonable, is to suspect ourselves, and put Questions to ourselves in private, which only our own Hearts can answer. Let any one who reads this Treatise, ask himself, Whether he reads it, as he reads those things which have no Relation to himself? When he reads a Treatise against *Image Worship*, or Prayers to *Saints*, he knows that he attends to the whole Force of the Arguments; that he desires to see them in their full Strength, and to comprehend every Evil that they charge upon it. Now every one can tell, whether he reads this Treatise with this Temper, or whether he comes heavily to it, and unwilling to be convinced by it. If this is his State, he ought to charge himself with all that, which he charges upon the most absurd and perverse People in Life. For it is only this Temper, an *Inclination* not to be convinced, that makes People so *positive* and *obstinate* in Ways and Opinions, that
appear

appear so shocking to all reasonable Men. It is this Temper, that makes the *Jew*, the *Infidel*, the *Papist*, and the *Fanatic* of every kind. And he that is not reasonable enough to read impartially a Treatise against the *Stage*, has no Reason to think that his Mind is in better Order than theirs is, who cannot freely consider a Book that is wrote against the *Worship of Images*, and Prayers to *Saints*.

There is but one Thing for reasonable People to do in this Case, either to answer all the Arguments here produced against the *Stage*, or to yield to the Truth of them, and regulate their Lives according to them. Our Conduct in this Affair is far from being a small Matter. I have produced no Arguments, but such as are taken from the most Essential Parts of Religion: If therefore there is any Truth in them, the Use of the *Stage* is certainly to be reckoned among *great and flagrant Sins*.

I have now only to advise those, who are hereby made sensible of the Necessity of renouncing the *Stage*, that they will act in this Case, as they expect that others should act in Cases of the like nature; that they will not think it sufficient to forbear the *Stage* themselves, but be instrumental as far as they can in keeping others from it; and that they will think it as necessary to make this Amends for their former Compliance, and ill Example, as it is necessary to make *Restitution* in cases of Injury. The Cause of Religion, the Honour of God, the Good of their Neighbour, and the Peace and Satisfaction of their own Minds; necessarily require this at their Hands. For as no one can tell how far his Example may have influenced others, and how many People may have been injured by his means, so it is absolutely necessary, that he do as much good as he can by a better Example, and make his own Change of Life a Means of reducing others to the same State of Amendment.

F I N I S.